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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9361

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000718

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA & EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA REACTS TO RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPING INCREASE

REF: A. A. TBILISI 536

[¶](#)B. B. TBILISI 714

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b&d).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) On April 29, acting Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze told ambassadors and charges from the U.S., U.K., Germany, France, and the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) that the increase in strength of the Russian peacekeeping force was the latest in a series of Russian steps intended to draw Georgia into an armed conflict. Vashadze emphasized that Georgia would not take military action nor would ask the Russian peacekeepers to leave, but cautioned that the current situation was in a "dangerous stage" as Russia continued to strengthen its control over Abkhazia. Minister for Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili made a public statement calling the Russian increase "illegal," because the move was not agreed to by the Georgian side. UNOMIG estimates that the CIS PKF is increasing its strength by approximately 500 personnel, which would bring the total number of peacekeepers to 2,500 - about 500 short of the maximum allowed by the 1994 CIS Decision establishing the peacekeeping force. President Saakashvili gave a televised address directed explicitly to the populations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, offering them a "hand of friendship" and outlining his proposals for Abkhaz and South Ossetian autonomy and representation in the Georgian government. Separately, two U.S. experts arrived in Georgia April 30 to join an international fact finding group organized by the Georgian Ministry of Defense to investigate the April 20 shootdown of a Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) over Abkhazia. End summary.

Vashadze Objects Strongly, Says Georgia Will React Rationally

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Georgia's acting Foreign Minister, Grigol Vashadze, told ambassadors and charges from the U.S., U.K., Germany, France, and UNOMIG April 29 that the increase in the strength of the Russian peacekeeping force (announced, he claimed, with the help of five Russian public statements in one day) was the latest in a series of Russian steps intended to draw Georgia into an armed conflict. Vashadze said that in normal circumstances Georgia would not object so strongly to the additional peacekeepers, but over the last two months, Russia has been carrying out a concerted policy to gain firmer control over Abkhazia by changing the "situation on the ground," while Georgia has been playing catch-up with statements in response. He called the current situation a "dangerous stage."

[¶](#)3. (C) Vashadze made it clear that Georgia would not do "something stupid" by taking military action. He said Georgia would not even ask the Russian peacekeepers to leave. He said Georgia would, however, like to see its western friends signal to the Russians in a concrete way, not just through statements, that we disapprove of Russian actions.

For example, he suggested, why not give Georgia a NATO Membership Action (MAP) immediately, to show the Russians we will not accept their policy? Vashadze agreed with the Ambassador that there had been strong signs of international support recently, including the joint statement by Western countries in New York April 23. He also expressed satisfaction with the international response to Georgia's request for experts to review the evidence of the April 20 shootdown of a Georgian UAV (Note: two U.S. experts arrived in Georgia on April 30 to participate in this international fact finding group. End note). The French Ambassador noted that a French expert analysis (the text of which is currently classified) indicated the plane responsible for the shootdown was a MIG-29 or an SU-27, both planes that could realistically only be operated by Russia.

UNOMIG: Russia increasing PKF to 2,500

¶4. (C) According to unofficial UNOMIG estimates, the Russians are increasing the troop strength of the CIS PKF by approximately 500 personnel, which would bring the total number of peacekeepers to 2,500. This is within the maximum 3,000 personnel allowed by the 1994 CIS Decision establishing the peacekeeping force, although Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili has denounced any increase without the agreement of the Georgian side to be illegal (Comment: the 1994 CIS Decision is vague on this point, though one passage states that "the plan of operations on deployment of the collective force shall be approved by the conflicting sides in compliance with the (1994 Moscow Agreement)," which implies the need for Georgian approval. End comment). According to UNOMIG, 12-13 BMP armored vehicles arrived to the Zone of Conflict on April 27, with an additional trainload of 25 BMP armored vehicles, nine armored personnel carriers, eight

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trucks and their associated personnel arriving April 29. UNOMIG officials told us that UNOMIG typically receives written notification with specific dates and details in advance of any CIS PKF troop rotations. In this instance, UNOMIG did not receive written notification of the increase until April 29, after much of the military hardware had already been moved into Abkhazia.

¶5. (C) As justification for the Russian increase in PKF troop levels, the Russian Foreign Ministry claimed in a statement on April 29 that Georgia, in violation of the 2000 Gali protocol, had stationed more than 1,500 personnel in the Upper Kodori Gorge and claiming Georgia was "concentrating" its forces on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Note: the 2000 Gali protocol limits the number of police to 600 inside the Zone of Conflict, though either side can exceed this number with prior notification to UNOMIG. The Upper Kodori Gorge is outside the Zone and neither the Gali protocol nor the 1994 Moscow agreement places limits on the number of police in Kodori. End note). UNOMIG, which has an observation post in the Upper Kodori Gorge, confirmed to us that despite these Russian claims, there has been no significant buildup of Georgian troops either within the Zone of Conflict or in the Upper Kodori Gorge. A UNOMIG official acknowledged to us that the Georgians have increased their numbers slightly in Kodori to about 800 personnel, but estimated these forces did not have the capacity to carry out an offensive action.

Saakashvili Reaches Out to Abkhaz, Ossetians

¶6. (U) President Saakashvili gave a televised address April 29 directed explicitly to the populations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, encouraging them to "stand together" with Georgians against an "outrageous and irresponsible force" (meaning Russia) that threatens their security and denies them a better life. He stressed that Georgia offers the Abkhaz and South Ossetians peace, a "hand of friendship," better living conditions built by working together, and specific proposals for autonomy and representation in the

Georgian government. Life with Georgia, he said, would mean "life without corruption...opportunities for free and legal business activities...an open economy and borders, rule of law and order," as well as freedom to choose leaders democratically. He pledged that no one would be allowed to question the existence of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian nations, whom he called brothers and sisters. He acknowledged the "difficult conditions" of life in the separatist regions, created by criminal ruling groups imposed from outside. Saakashvili said Abkhaz and Ossetians needed "protection, care, and development," not an outside force making decisions for them and trying to engage them in conflict with Georgia for its own purposes.

Comment

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17. (C) Senior Georgian officials, despite increasing Russian pressure, are remaining calm and continuing to push President Saakashvili's plan for a peaceful resolution of the conflicts (ref A). The Georgians continue to publicly and privately express their willingness to solve the conflicts peacefully, a position that we will continue to encourage. This latest Russian move, however, coming so closely on the heels of the April 16 "Putin instructions" and the April 20 downing of the Georgian UAV has only reinforced Georgian fears of an accelerated annexation of Abkhazia by Russia.

TEFFT